

what's up?

unintended pregnancy

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What's it all about?

Unintended pregnancy is an important issue for people of all ages, but there are special risks and concerns for adolescents. Teen pregnancy poses a serious health risk for both the mother and the baby. The infants of teen mothers are more likely to be underweight or die in the first month of life than the infants of older mothers. In addition to the medical issues, teen parents are more likely to live in poverty than their peers.

Teens who become pregnant are generally not married and usually did not intend to be parents at such a young age. More than 13,000 15- to 19-year-old girls in Washington become pregnant each year. Because many teens have faced pregnancy scares or been pregnant themselves, unintended pregnancy is an important adolescent issue.

Why does it matter?

Most teens don't want to be teen parents. In Washington, about 70% of pregnancies in women under 20 years of age were unintended.

Compared to their peers who have children later, teen parents are:

- More likely to have low birth-weight children who will suffer from poor health and development.
- More likely to have low family incomes, live in poverty and receive public assistance.
- At increased risk of substance abuse, intimate partner violence, maternal depression and divorce or separation.

What are the details?

- While the overall teen pregnancy rate for the state of Washington is below the national average and has been declining since 1989, rates in several counties still remain above the national average.
- 35% of young women in the U.S. become pregnant before they reach the age of 20.
- About 1-in-5 infants born to unmarried minors are fathered by men 5 or more years older than the mother.
- The younger women are when they first have intercourse, the more likely it is to be unwanted or forced.
- 1 out of 4 teenage mothers in the U.S. have a second child within 2 years of their first.
- Nationally, the birth rate for teens, 15 to 19 years old, dropped by about 22% between 1991 and 2000. Some possible reasons for the decline may be a decrease in sexual activity and an increase in birth control use among teens.
- The U.S. teen pregnancy rate is one of the highest among industrialized nations.
- In the U.S., approximately 1 out of 7 sexually experienced 14-year-old girls reports having been pregnant.

What can I do?

Here are some tips for parents of teens based on research, expert opinion and the experience of other families, excerpted from “10 Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy” by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:

1. Know your own values and attitudes about sex in order to be able to communicate and discuss them.
2. Build a strong relationship with your teen, nurtured from an early age and built on open communication, trust and respect.
3. Begin early and be specific when talking about sex. Invite teens to share what they know or think.
4. As parents, supervise and monitor your kids—make sure someone is available for them after school or when you can't be there.
5. Know and welcome your kids' friends and their parents.
6. Discourage early and frequent dating.
7. Establish a rule with your son or daughter against dating someone who is more than 2 years younger or older.
8. Help your teens set goals and plan for the future so that they have good reasons to avoid getting pregnant early on.
9. Encourage your child to take school seriously. Show interest in your children's work and volunteer at their school.
10. Be aware of what types of media your child is exposed to so you can help them think critically about the messages they are hearing.

What can I do if my teen becomes pregnant?

If pregnancy occurs, teenagers and their families may need sensitive and accurate counseling about options available to them.

What do teens want?

No single approach to teen pregnancy prevention is appropriate for all adolescents in all circumstances and in every community. It is clear, however, that there is demonstrated success when teens have:

- **A range of choices.** All adolescents need sexuality education that teaches them refusal skills and gives them up-to-date information about contraceptives and sexually transmitted infections before they are sexually active. The Institute of Medicine found that “sexuality education programs that provide information on both abstinence and contraceptive use neither encourage the onset of sexual intercourse nor increase the frequency of intercourse among adolescents...programs that provide both messages appear effective in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse and encouraging contraceptive use once sexual activity has begun, especially among younger adolescents.”
- **Strong emotional attachments.** Teens who are close to their parents are less likely to be sexually active early on.
- **Parents' advice.** About 3 out of 4 adolescents 15 to 17 years old say that they have learned “some” or “a lot” on sexual health from their parents. Parents need to stress that there are consequences to sex besides pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including the impact on a teen's emotional development, family life and future goals.
- **Contraception.** About 8 out of 10 sexually active adolescents, 15 to 17 years old, say they use condoms regularly, but more than 40% of high school students say they did not use a condom at last sexual intercourse. A sexually active teen couple that does not use contraception has about an 85% chance of pregnancy within 1 year.

**hot
links!**

Washington State Department of Health
DOH Pub 910-114 11/2003
www.doh.wa.gov

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America (Teen site) www.teenwire.org

Alan Guttmacher Institute www.agi-usa.org/sections/youth.html

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy www.teenpregnancy.org

Crisis Pregnancy Hotline 1-800-PREGNAN (1-800-773-4626)

Sexual Health for America's Adolescents D.W.Haffner, Journal of School Health, 1996, 66(4):151-153

Teen Health and the Media <http://depts.washington.edu/thmedia/>
University of Washington, Early Childhood/Teen Communications Project

Kids Health www.teenshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/
Sexual health information for teens

Kaiser Family Foundation www.kff.org
Go to “Adolescent Sexual Health”

Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org
Go to Facts for Families, “When Children Have Children” (Fact Sheet #31)



Dear Colleague,

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is pleased to provide camera-ready art for printing this educational material. To ensure that the original quality of the piece is maintained, please read and follow the instructions below and the specifications included for professional printing.

- **Use the latest version.** DOH materials are developed using the most current information available, are checked for clinical accuracy, and are field tested with the intended audience to ensure they are clear and readable. DOH programs make periodic revisions to educational materials, so please check this web site to be sure you have the latest version. DOH assumes no responsibility for the use of this material or for any errors or omissions.
- **Do not alter.** We are providing this artwork with the understanding that it will be printed without alterations and copies will be free to the public. Do not edit the text or use illustrations or photographs for other purposes without first contacting us. Please do not alter or remove the DOH logo, publication number or revision date. If you want to use a part of this publication for other purposes, contact the Office of Health Promotion first.
- **For quality reproduction:** Low resolution PDF files are intended for black and white or color desktop printers. They work best if you are making only one or two copies. High resolution PDF files are intended for reproducing large quantities and are set up for use by professional offset print shops. The high resolution files also include detailed printing specifications. Please match them as closely as possible and insist on the best possible quality for all reproductions.

If you have questions, contact:

Office of Health Promotion

P.O. Box 47833 Olympia, WA 98504-7833

(360) 236-3736

Sincerely,

Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team